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SNAPSHOT

Widow Sets Up Business

USAID assists vulnerable Afghan women, many of whom are widows



[Photo: ACAP]

Fatima and her family appreciate the assistance they received through the USAID project.

With assistance from USAID, Fatima's brother-in-law was able to get livestock to generate income for the household and Fatima started her own home business.

A USAID project helps thousands of vulnerable Afghan women and families who have suffered loss resulting from international military operations against the Taliban and other insurgents. The focus is on relatively small-scale assistance that helps beneficiaries rebuild their lives and earn a living. The project also assists widows, a sector of society that is particularly vulnerable, as they were financially dependent on their husbands.

USAID recently helped 25-year-old Fatima, a widow, and her five children after her husband Yusof was accidentally killed in a firefight between International Security Assistance Forces and Taliban fighters in December 2009, in the Nada Ali District of Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan. The rocket propelled grenade struck their home killing two civilians, including Yusof, and injuring two others.

Already in debt, as she and her husband struggled to pay for essentials such as food and firewood, Fatima moved in with her brother-in-law per Afghan society tradition. However, the financial situation of the family looked bleak until USAID stepped in. While the project offers widows the chance to make their choice of small business, male relatives often make the decisions.

As a compromise to her brother-in-law's wishes, USAID provided a small flock of sheep to the family and gave Fatima \$500 worth of provisions to set up a ladies' home store including soap, shampoo, washing powder, face cream, cleaning products, children's candy, and basic cooking ingredients. Even though it is rare for women in Afghanistan to run a shop of their own, Fatima's children now help her run the shop from a room in their home, and it has become popular with women and children in the village.

Although it is common for widows in Afghanistan to marry a relative of their late husband, Fatima said, "I am happy because USAID has made life a lot easier for me and I do not need to get married. It is difficult to describe how much I appreciate what USAID has done for me and my family."